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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI POLITICAL ROUNDUP: PARLIAMENT, OPPOSITION, AND A
RARE MEETING OF THE TWO

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 755; 09 DJIBOUTI 1159

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Prime Minister opened Djibouti's parliamentary session October 1 with a speech highlighting the GODJ's significant ongoing investments in health, education, and poverty reduction. Several days before the opening of parliament, the three-party opposition coalition which boycotted 2005, 2006, and 2008 elections issued a communique rejecting the idea of a constitutional amendment to allow President Guelleh to run for a third term in office, and calling for the formation of a transitional government of national unity. Meanwhile, an Embassy public diplomacy program brought members of all legal political parties together for a seminar on proportional representation-gathering both majority coalition and opposition parties together in the same room for informal consultations, in what may be the first gathering of its kind in recent memory. END SUMMARY.

PRIME MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS SOCIAL

INVESTMENT AT OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

¶2. (U) CDA a.i. and USAID Representative attended the formal opening of Djibouti's National Assembly on October 1. Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita's keynote speech highlighted largely social and development issues. While noting that the continued deployment of Djiboutian forces along the Djibouti-Eritrea border demanded ongoing resources, the Prime Minister focused on Djibouti's social investment. (NOTE. The GODJ devotes 25 percent of its budget to education and over 10 percent to health. END NOTE.) Main issues covered included:

--ECONOMY AND GROWTH: The Prime Minister noted that the proposed 2010 budget represented a ten percent increase over 2009, for a total of nearly 83 billion Djibouti francs (approximately 469 million USD). Almost two thirds of this amount was devoted to operational budgets, with the remainder dedicated to "investment." The Prime Minister attributed the relatively limited impact of the global financial crisis on Djibouti to "good financial management," and noted that the projected 6 percent growth rate would be mostly due to foreign direct investment, growth in the port and construction sectors, and macroeconomic reforms. The international community, he said, had recognized Djibouti's "stability," and foreign direct investment was at 35 percent of GDP.

--HEALTH AND EDUCATION: The Prime Minister called health and

education "social sectors essential for the future of our country." Upcoming priorities included the construction of a university and two new middle schools, as well as the establishment of professional training centers and sports playing fields.

--RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: A new building is planned to house Djibouti's National Study and Research Center (CERD). The first 700 date plants in a CERD-run project to fight food insecurity through date palm cultivation are slated to go out to regions outside the capital in 2010.

--TRANSPORT: A new deepwater port is to be constructed at the northern city of Tadjourah. A new road from Tadjourah to Ethiopia through the now-remote northwestern towns of Dorra and Balho will complement an already-completed road between Tadjourah and the second northern town of Obock (ref A).

--POVERTY REDUCTION AND FOOD SECURITY: The Prime Minister highlighted the GODJ's over one billion Djibouti franc investment (approximately 5.6 million USD) in poverty reduction initiatives. Over 642 low-income housing units are slated for completion in

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¶2010. The Prime Minister also noted that Djibouti is stocking strategic food reserves, and working with regional partners-including Sudan, Ethiopia, and Malawi -to obtain land to grow grains for Djiboutian consumption.

--SOMALIA: "Djibouti's political direction in this area has not changed," said the Prime Minister, "it's about giving the means to Somalis to take charge of their destiny and their development."

OPPOSITION COMMUNIQUE CALLS FOR KEEPING TERM
LIMITS, GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

¶3. (SBU) The opposition coalition UAD (Union for a Democratic Alternance) issued an "Appeal to the Djiboutian People and the International Community" dated September 26. UAD (ref B) regroups the UDJ (Union for Democracy and Justice), ARD (Republican Alliance for Democracy) and MRD (Movement for Democratic Renewal). The MRD was banned by presidential decree in 2008, after its leader was accused of inviting Eritrea to invade Djibouti.

¶4. (SBU) In the communique, the UAD argued that the international community had not recognized the "gravity" of the situation in Djibouti, and that President Guelleh was interpreting this "attitude" as "support." The UAD rejected the idea of a possible constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in office, calling it an "irresponsible and dangerous" initiative that could "open the way for a presidency for life." The parties warned against "serious risks" of "social explosion" and "civil war" in Djibouti, but reiterated their own commitment to a "peaceful fight." The UAD called the Djiboutian people to unity and a "decisive mobilization against dictatorship," and appealed to the international community to "use all its influence to make

President Guelleh see reason."

15. (SBU) The UAD proposed the formation of a transitional government of national unity, with participation from the opposition, the ruling coalition, and civil society. Inter alia, the UAD asserted that this government should establish a true multiparty system, advance the decentralization process, guarantee an independent and operational justice system, re-examine the constitutional council, establish an independent national electoral commission with equal numbers of opposition and government members, respect fundamental liberties and human rights, and allow free and equal access for all political parties to public media. In conclusion, UAD closed by quoting President Obama's statement in Accra that "Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions."

EMBASSY SPEAKER GETS BOTH SIDES TO
SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND DISCUSS

16. (SBU) At the close of a week of programming with parliamentarians, local elected officials, and other audiences, a visiting Africa Regional Services (ARS) speaker on election systems met with all legal political parties in Djibouti on October 3. Ambassador had previously met with selected opposition leaders to urge that they participate in this event. ARS Speaker gave a talk on proportional representational systems to a packed audience of nearly 25 political party members, including every party from the ruling coalition and both legal opposition parties. Several party

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presidents participated. Proportional representation is under discussion at the National Assembly, and remains one of the opposition's longstanding demands. Discussions, while occasionally heated, were civil and lively, and participants from across the spectrum agreed that dialogue was important. A representative from the President's RPP (People's Rally for Progress) party noted that the RPP was "open to discussions" and had an "open door." Several participants thanked the Embassy Public Affairs Section for organizing the event, and for enabling a simple "hello" between the political parties. The event was covered by government-run newspaper and television.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) In Djibouti's close-knit society, actors from ruling coalition and opposition political parties are very likely to know each other socially, or to share ties of neighborhood or kinship. Nevertheless, it remains significant that key players from these two "camps" were willing to participate together in a formal, public event covered by national media. It is also significant that participants universally declared themselves ready for dialogue. The sharp rhetoric of the opposition coalition's communique must also be read in light of their willingness to sit down with the majority coalition partners-and by the willingness of coalition partners to at least meet them part of the way. Looking toward 2011 presidential elections, Post will continue to look for ways to engage all political parties, and to provide venues for

parties to initiate dialogue among themselves. END COMMENT.
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